

If this is your first time appearing before the Planning Commission,
READ THIS Introduction

If you are appearing before the Planning Commission for the first time, the following information will help you understand the process and suggestions for effectively expressing your views and opinions.

The Commission is made up of seven citizens appointed by the City Council. It considers items on its docket and either makes a recommendation to the City Council, or approves the items in cases of subdivision and development site plans. Most items go on to a City Council hearing for a final decision.

The Commission wants to hear your views on the items it considers. It does not expect you to be as informed on land use law and Commission procedures as those who appear before it often, such as lawyers for applicants. If you need help giving the Commission your views, the Commission Chair will try to assist you and explain the process.

Glossary

Applicant – The party that representing the request before the Planning Commission.

Chair/Chairman/Chairwoman – The member of the Planning Commission who chairs, or runs, the meeting. He or she sits in the center seat. The Chair is usually addressed as either Mr. Chair or Madam Chair.

Docket – The agenda listing the items that the Commission will consider at its meeting. The meeting will almost always follow the order in the printed docket, which you can get from the table outside of the Commission meeting room. At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair will announce docket items that will not be heard because they have been deferred to the next meeting or withdrawn.

Consent agenda

The consent agenda is at the beginning of the docket. It lists the docket items the staff predicts are non-controversial. It is approved by the Commission or recommended for City Council approval all at one time, and usually quickly. However, anyone - citizen, developer, staff, or Planning Commissioner - can ask that an item be taken off the consent agenda so that they can talk about it. Items taken off the consent agenda are considered immediately after the remaining consent agenda items are approved.

Written material available

The docket and staff report for each docket item are available at the table outside of the meeting room. They are also available for pick up at the Department of Planning and Zoning Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and on the City's Web site at www.alexandriava.gov. You should read and be familiar with the staff report of any item you wish to address to the Commission.

Speaking procedure

On-line Speaker Form—Speaker forms can be completed and submitted online at <http://dockets.alexandriava.gov/pz/p&zyl.nsf/Planning%20Commission?OpenView>. Open the docket for the meeting at which you would like to speak, and click on the Speaker Form button at the top of the docket. Online speaker forms can be submitted up to 4:30pm the day of the meeting.

Speaker forms are also available at the meeting and can be submitted when the item is called.

Listen for Your Name – The Chair will call the names of the upcoming speakers. When the Chair calls your name be ready to speak by coming up to one of the podiums. You can wait in or by the benches directly behind the podiums just before you speak.

Identify Yourself – When you start speaking, state your name and address for the record of the meeting. Also state if you are representing a particular group or organization.

Speaking Etiquette – Only address the Chair or any Commissioner who is asking you a question. Do not speak or argue directly with the opposing side. This makes it easier for the Chair to run a fair meeting and maintain order.

Time limits for speakers

Be concise - you may be limited to 3 minutes if there are many speakers for the evening or for your docket item. Because many people may speak on your item, be clear and to the point so your views can be remembered and acted on.

What do you want the Commission to do?

Be specific about what you want the Commission to do. Your ideas and viewpoints will translate better with the Commission if you are specific about the action that you would like to see taken. Feel free to prepare written statements that can be given to staff and Commission for consideration and inclusion in the record.

Off limits arguments

The Commission is not allowed by law to consider some arguments. For example, the Commission cannot consider the competitive impact on neighboring businesses when it considers an action. If you start to make off limit arguments, the Chair will warn you that the Commission cannot consider them.

Closed public hearing

After all the speakers for a particular item have addressed the Commission, the Chair will propose to close the public hearing. At which time, no other public speakers will be heard and the Commission will discuss the request with staff and the applicant. If an item is deferred to another meeting, the public hearing will remain closed and no speakers will be heard unless there is a passing vote to reopen the public hearing.